



*Serving the Soldiers and Civilians of the 7th Signal Brigade*

# the Desert Wire

Volume I, No. 4

*"Voice of Freedom"*

May 2004

## Eye opener

□ **Signal Soldiers provide vital video communications support**

**By Staff Sgt. Peter Fitzgerald**

7th Signal Brigade Public Affairs Office

CAMP DOHA, Kuwait – Keeping an eye on the enemy is key to battlefield success, and troops from the 7<sup>th</sup> Signal Brigade recently played a vital role in military video communications operations in Iraq. A team of Soldiers flew from Kuwait to Iraq in May to install a commercial communications terminal to support the 1<sup>st</sup> Military Intelligence Battalion's unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) mission there.

"(Our work) enables the battalion to provide live video, taken from the Hunter and I-GNAT (Army UAVs), for various military and intelligence gathering agencies," said Capt. Thomas Hooper, network operations and plans officer in charge, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 7<sup>th</sup> Signal Brigade.

Along with a communications terminal, a commercial telephone switch and associated data package were also installed to replace the military equipment that was in use. All of the equipment provides video feeds that directly support command and control operations in theater, and further intelligence gathering missions around the world.

Getting the equipment installed presented a number of challenges for the team of Soldiers. With an ever-present enemy actively engaging the compound with mortar attacks, the team had to perform the mission in a specified timeframe. To keep the video feeds coming in, the installation had to



Photos courtesy of Capt. Thomas Hooper

A team of 7th Signal Brigade Soldiers loads up for a mission in Iraq. (From left): Capt. Thomas Hooper, Sgt. 1st Class William Norton, Sgt. Guy Cooper (above), Staff Sgt. Grover Norton (in front), Chief Warrant Officer 2 Andre Wilson and Sgt. 1st Class Anthony Jones.

be completed between the time one UAV landed and the next one was due to take off.

"The enemy mortar attacks hampered our efforts, but the team worked through the night to complete the mission," said Hooper.

Capt. Robert Nettles, battalion signal officer, 1<sup>st</sup> Military Intelligence Battalion, said the brigade Soldiers performed well under the conditions.

"There were a few obstacles, but they worked at it until the job was done. The team beat the deadline by two hours, allowing us not to miss a single mission," he said.

Despite the particular challenges, the team members said they got a lot out of the mission. Working under time constraints, high temperatures and scattered mortar attacks, even veteran Soldiers found it a learning experience.

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### Inside...



319th Signal Battalion steps up in roadside rescue, *page 4*.



Voice of Freedom University goes downrange, *page 7*.

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Deployment in photos, *pages 10-12*.

### Photo of the month



A lunar eclipse passes over Camp Doha May 4.  
Photo composition by Staff Sgt. Peter Fitzgerald.



Col. Jennifer Napper  
Commander



Command Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Williams  
Command Sergeant Major

## the Desert Wire

A publication of the 7th Signal Brigade

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# Word on the street ...

A look at what soldiers on deployment are saying

## **The question:** What are your plans to beat the heat?

By Spc. William Garreans



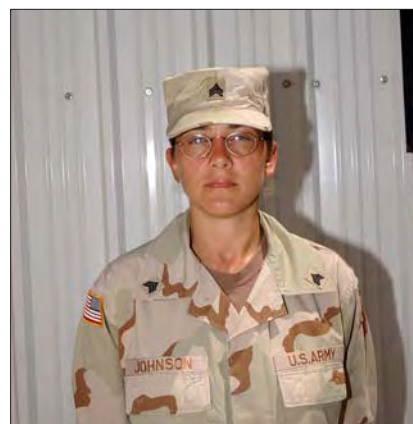
"Hydrate, Hydrate, Hydrate.  
It's better than an IV."

Spc. Aaron Crooker  
2nd Platoon, 301st Signal Company



"Drink water, hog the air  
conditioner and try to be on  
night shift."

Spc. Peter Bui  
HHC, 319th Signal Battalion



"I enjoy lying out in the kiddie  
pool at the Marble Palace, and I  
try to stay indoors as much as  
possible."

Sgt. Carissa Johnson  
HHC, 7th Signal Brigade



"Just deal with it, and try to  
think about all the winter  
months spent in Graf."

Spc. Daniel Gill  
C Company, 72nd Signal Battalion



"Drink water and put in work  
orders to fix broken air  
conditioners."

Sgt. Dallas Wortham  
HHC, 72nd Signal Battalion



"Stay hydrated, try to stay  
inside as much as possible."

Staff Sgt. Yolanda Simmons  
HHC, 67th Signal Battalion



# 319th Signal Battalion to the rescue



Command Sgt. Maj. Paul Belanger directs the Medivac helicopter down on a stretch of highway.

## ❑ Soldiers arrive at accident scene, take action

By Capt. James Hall

319th Signal Battalion

Camp Virginia, Kuwait—When you think of soldiers working in staff positions, you probably picture Soldiers sitting in offices answering phones and doing paperwork. For the most part, you'd be right, but not on a particular day in late April. On April 21, Soldiers from 319<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion's Headquarters and Headquarters Company were out getting their hands dirty and bloody, literally.

On the way back from Iraq, the Soldiers came upon a nasty traffic accident which had just occurred. A truck rear ended another to avoid some camels. The passenger of the rear vehicle was literally ripped from the cab of his truck, seat and all. The soldiers of that unit were able to cut him free of his seatbelt, but were so shaken, they didn't really know what to do next. Lucky for them our soldiers arrived.

Warrant Officer 1 Andrew VanVeen quickly assessed the patient's condition and began first aid. His training as a California Highway Patrolman was invaluable. Assisting him was Chief Warrant Officer 3 Jim Akers, who recently completed the Combat Life Saver course at Fort Bliss, Texas. As the two warrant officers began patching up the injured Soldier, Staff Sgt. Shane McBride reassured him as well as distracted him from the pain.



Soldiers work together to get the stretcher to the helicopter.

*Photos by Spc. Paul Binder*

"He was one tough soldier," remarked McBride.

While all of this was going on, Command Sgt. Maj. Paul Belanger got on his cell phone and called for a helicopter medical evacuation (Medivac). Armed with a Global Positioning System (GPS) device and years of aviation experience, Belanger was able to direct the helicopter to their exact location and guide it down in a very tight spot between power lines and light poles onto the highway.

Spc. Nathan Short, from Alabama, was stabilized from his numerous leg injuries – a compound fracture of the leg, a compound fracture of the ankle, a huge open gash, and several abrasions as well as possible neck and back injuries. By the time the Medivac arrived, Short was just starting to go into shock. The flight nurse started an IV and VanVeen and McBride assisted in loading the patient.

It is the opinion of this writer that Command Sergeant Major Belanger, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Akers, Warrant Officer 1 VanVeen, and Staff Sergeant McBride saved Specialist Short's life that day through their quick thinking, decisive actions, and calm demeanor. They may not have been an "Army of One," but on this day, they were definitely "All They Could Be."



Troops from the 319th Signal Battalion work quickly to render first aid to the injured Soldier.



The accident did severe damage to the military vehicle, ripping the seat from the cab.

## Conference Call

The past month saw several gatherings at Marble Palace as senior leaders met for conferences to discuss a number of issues related to the 7<sup>th</sup> Signal Brigade deployment. A senior noncommissioned officer conference was held May 20 and featured guest speakers from across the brigade, along with presentations from various local agencies and units, including the Red Cross, Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Equal Opportunity. That meeting was followed with a commanders conference held June 3. Topics discussed at both conferences included safety, taking care of soldiers, retention and the direction of the Signal Corps. Signal leaders then gathered on the evening of June 3 for a Signal Corps Regimental Association Dinner at the Marble Palace complex. Here are pictures from all three events.



Col. Jennifer Napper leads the commanders conference.



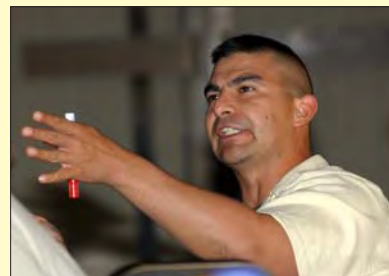
Maj. Seena Tucker, Capt. Raymond Butler, Capt. Anne-Marie Weirsgalla, 1st Lt. James Minicozzi and 1st Sgt. Robert Daniel join the Bronze Order of Mercury at the Signal Regimental Association Dinner.



Master Sgt. William Keating discusses retention issues.



NCO and Soldier of the Quarter, Sgt. Chad Burkett and Spc. MaryLynn Villafane, are recognized.



Capt. Renato Medina raises an important point during discussions at the conference.



CSM Jerry Russell and CSM Kenneth Williams speak at the Senior NCO conference.



The crowd applauds as Lt. Col. John Schrader goes to claim his raffle prize at the Signal Regimental Association Dinner.



## New York state of mind

□ Company commander takes look at life for 67th Signal Battalion Soldiers at Kuwaiti camp

By Capt. James E. Christman

A Company, 67th Signal Battalion

CAMP NEW YORK, Kuwait – Alpha Company has settled in well at Camp New York. We have all adjusted to life here: getting dressed in the middle of the night to go out to the port-a-jon; walking outside to a shower trailer to shower, shave, and brush your teeth; and walking a half mile to the dining facility for meals, only to wait in line for 20 minutes to get in – just to name a few of the inconveniences.

The camp is a relatively barren plot of desert about six miles around. While it is mostly sand and fine dust, there are hints of vegetation. This spring was unusually wet, and produced an abundance of plants. A couple of weeds sprouted up through the razor wire, the only place left untouched by Army boots and vehicles. This year wild yellow and purple flowers grow where the desert remains untouched, and there is a large patch of grass and weeds growing along one of the berms.

Berms, or piles of earth piled to form a barrier, surround the camp. These berms were surrounded with razor wire, to keep out intruders during the war. Now, the berms serve to keep out intruders, human and animal alike. Several camel herders grazed their herds very near the berm once, and gave our quick reaction forces, or QRF, quite a workout.

"The QRF chase camels and sheep off the berm on a daily basis. In fact, if the camels are angry at you they hiss and spit," says Spc. Jason Michalek, 26, switch operator, A Company. Michalek has been in the Army for three years,



Photos by Staff Sgt. Peter Fitzgerald

Two soldiers make their way across Camp New York.

is married to Heather, and has one daughter, Alexandria, 22 months old. This is the Michaleks' first deployment and, as he terms it, "a definite learning experience." He adds, "I like seeing how the Army works as a whole, and watching our unit put to use in a real world mission. We'll all leave here personally and professionally more mature. I feel like I'm a part of history, doing good for the world."

While there are drawbacks to living on a camp in the middle of the Kuwaiti desert, amenities abound. The base camp has an AT&T phone center, though the wait in line deters all but the hardest camp denizens. There are fast food restaurants just like back in the states, though they are take out only. In fact, it's almost like the town square, with

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The 67th Signal Battalion compound at Camp New York.

# 'Voice of Freedom University' goes downrange

□ Promina training prepares Soldiers on latest technology

Story and photos by  
Staff Sgt. Peter Fitzgerald

7th Signal Brigade Public Affairs Office

CAMP DOHA, Kuwait – Despite busy schedules and ongoing mission requirements, Soldiers of the 7<sup>th</sup> Signal Brigade have made time for advanced technical training while on deployment.

"We should always be training, whether we're in system or not," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 James Riedmueller, network engineer, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 7<sup>th</sup> Signal Brigade.

Riedmueller and a team of instructors have been training Soldiers on the Promina 800 Series multiplexer system. The system is capable of consolidating a diverse amount of traffic onto a single platform, combining several circuits into a single trunk. The Promina is the latest in signal technology, providing communications packages with greater capability and enabling greater efficiency.

"The entire signal community is moving away from the older FCC-100 to the Promina," explained



Sgt. Michael Craig, A Company, 72nd Signal Battalion, (left) has a question on the Promina 800 Series for course instructor Chief Warrant Officer 2 James Riedmueller, HHC, 7th Signal Brigade.

Riedmueller. "As the network requires more bandwidth, this system allows us to meet user demands and gives us a more robust, efficient and stable tactical network."

Data packages that aren't already fielded with the Promina system will be soon. The current training is preparing Soldiers with hands-on instruction on how to use the equipment.

Sgt. Karl King, data team, C Company, 72<sup>nd</sup> Signal Battalion, came to the course because his team is getting fielded with the Promina system. After getting familiar with the equipment, he agreed with the improvements over the older system.

"We finally had a chance to sit down and go over the equipment step-by-step and it's excellent," he said. "This is going to bring much more reliable mission capability."

Spc. Ronald Rigdon, data team, C Company, 72<sup>nd</sup> Signal Battalion, had never touched a Promina system before and didn't know what to expect of the training.

"I was very surprised to get a class like this (on deployment)," he said. "It's not your typical classroom, but the instruction is very detailed and we learned each part of the system."

Set up in a warehouse bay across from the brigade Tactical Network Operations Security Center, the classroom is essentially "Voice of Freedom University" downrange. Some 70 Soldiers have completed the training since early May. Riedmueller and fellow instructors, Warrant Officer 1 Jon Bates and Staff Sgt. Michael Howard, have been offering two separate classes on the Promina. A weeklong course is given to operators so they can actually run the system and troubleshoot when necessary. The instructors also teach a two-day familiarization course intended for controllers and battle captains.

Though scheduled for only a limited duration, demand for the training has been heavy. In addition to training brigade troops, the instructors have also received many requests from outside units, including 160<sup>th</sup> Signal Brigade and 335<sup>th</sup> Theater Signal Command. As efforts to commercialize continue and new equipment arrives in theater, the instructors anticipate scheduling more courses.

"There is demand for more training and we recognize the need," said Riedmueller. "This is the direction the Army's taking, so we have to get these Soldiers trained."



Riedmueller helps prepare Sgt. Karl King, C Company, 72nd Signal Battalion, for Promina fielding.



## UAV

From page 1

"Every time I do an install I learn something new," said Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class William Norton, mission noncommissioned officer in charge. "Installing the antenna was slightly more difficult as this was first time we have done it wearing both Kevlar and body armor."

After getting the equipment installed and working long hours to get the shot in, the team was able to see immediate results of their efforts. They even watched live video of someone carrying an AK-47 rifle into a mosque.

"It was very interesting to see how much they can see from so far away," added Norton.

With the mission complete, Nettles stressed the importance of this installation to the intelligence community.

"It allows units to get video footage in near real time," he said. "Without it, this combat multiplier would be lost."

The mission had the added benefit of relieving military personnel and furthering the commercialization effort in Iraq. Civilian contractors will take over the operation and maintenance of the equipment, freeing up Soldiers from 269<sup>th</sup> and 69<sup>th</sup> Signal Companies, some of whom have been in theater for more than 400 days.

1<sup>st</sup> Lt. James Kalinowski, a platoon leader from 385<sup>th</sup> Signal Company, headed the redeployment effort of these troops and said the Soldiers were excited about the installation.

"Once they saw Captain Hooper's team it really lifted their spirits," he said. "They knew they were going home."



The Hunter UAV waits for its next mission. The Hunter is an Army version of the Predator UAV.



(From left): Staff Sgt. Grover Norton, Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class William Norton, Capt. Thomas Hooper and Sgt. Guy Cooper work to get the shot in on a mission in Iraq.

## Tell your story to the *Desert Wire*



*Every soldier has a story to tell, and the DESERT WIRE is looking for yours. We are looking for submissions to include in the monthly brigade newsletter.*

Stories can be about missions, the work you and your Soldiers do, life on deployment, local sights and attractions, or just about anything of interest to Soldiers and their loved ones. Pictures are also encouraged. If you have nice, high-resolution digital images, please feel free to send them in as well.

As a signal unit, we are scattered throughout the theater of operations. This is a great way to let others know what you're doing. For leaders, it's also a good way to

give your Soldiers some recognition for the hard work they're doing.

Submissions can be delivered to the 7th Signal Brigade Public Affairs Office, located in the S1/S4 trailer on Camp Doha. Or they can be sent by e-mail directly to: [peter.fitzgerald@kuwait.army.mil](mailto:peter.fitzgerald@kuwait.army.mil). Content must be submitted by the first week of every month to be considered for publication in that month. For any inquiries, please call DSN 318-438-3407. We look forward to your submissions.

**Visit the 7th Signal Brigade (FWD) website at:**  
**<https://www.7sigbde.arcent.army.mil/>**



## Chaplain's Corner ...

By Sgt. Ben Overturf

7th Signal Brigade Chaplain's Office

## The job of the chaplain assistant

People always approach me with this question: "What do you do on a day-to-day basis?"

I have to smile to myself when asked this because there is no easy answer. I also smile because every day is different and to answer the question fully would take more time than the person asking really wants to spend listening.

A chaplain assistant's main mission on the battlefield is to protect

the chaplain. Since chaplains are non-combatants and cannot carry weapons, security of the chaplain is essential. In the field, or a war time scenario, chaplains often do the driving while the chaplain assistant pulls security. This is why chaplains go through driver's training to get licensed on military vehicles. Other missions in the field include setting up for worship services, maintaining the equipment, assessing morale and battle fatigue, and keeping the chaplain out of harm's way.

Soldiers are sometimes leery of talking to the chaplain because of the rank difference, so often they come to the chaplain assistant first. This is when the chaplain assistant will listen to the soldier's concerns, assess the situation in order to help the chaplain, and help the soldier along to the chaplain. Most of the time a chaplain assistant acts as a link to the chaplain, making it easier for the soldier to receive counseling.

Because chaplain assistants deal with soldiers' concerns regularly, they are held to the same confidentiality standards that the chaplain is. This means that when you approach a chaplain or chaplain assistant with an issue they are legally bound to keep that information to themselves.

A chaplain assistant can also be seen setting up for chapel services and other extra events during the week. They are responsible for all chapel upkeep and maintenance. Other duties include the daily administrative office tasks, event coordination and general upkeep of the Unit Ministry Team equipment.

So, when you are at a chaplain led event such as a chapel service, a wedding, a memorial service, or a chaplain retreat, look for the chaplain assistant standing in the back, the one who helped make it happen.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Peter Fitzgerald

Sgt. Ben Overturf is the 7th Signal Brigade chaplain assistant.

## New York

From page 6

the Army and Air Force Exchange on one side of the square and Burger King, Subway, and the barber shop on the other side. The camp also has a Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR) tent filled with chairs and a large screen TV to watch movies. The tent sees quite a bit of use as Soldiers go there to unwind and take a break from the daily grind.



A sign points the way through the Kuwaiti desert.

The Kuwaiti spring was relatively mild, and breezes made the warm temperature bearable. But now that pleasant breeze has turned to an effect very similar to standing in front of a large blow dryer.

Pvt. 2 Ronnie Blue, 22, wire systems installer-maintainer, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 67<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion, terms it "surprising."

"It's already hot, and I hear it's going to get hotter," he says. Blue has been in the Army for nine months and also feels that the deployment is a positive experience. "We all



Signal operations at Camp New York.

get to bonding, and get to know each other a little bit better during this deployment."

While he has positive feelings about the deployment overall, Blue's feelings are tempered with reality. As the rest of the soldiers of Iraqi Freedom can attest, you never quite get used to walking to the shower, through the sand in sandals, only to return to your cot through the blowing sand.

"You walk back and forth in shower shoes, but by the time you get back to your tent you have to clean yourself off again," Blue observes.

# Desert Wire picture pages ...

The deployment in photos



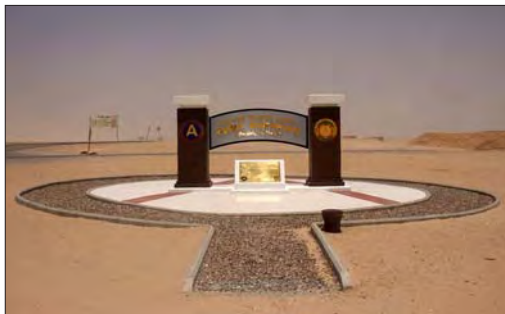
Photos by Staff Sgt. Peter Fitzgerald

A firing order is lead onto to the range at Camp Buehring by Sgt. 1st Class Alfonso Lopez, 72nd Signal Battalion.



Staff Sgt. Walter Rogers, 301st Signal Company, inspects the phone lines at Camp Buehring.

Camp Udairi is renamed Camp Buehring in honor of Lt. Col. Charles H. Buehring, who was killed in action last year in Baghdad.



Staff Sgt. Michael Teas, HHC, 7th Signal Brigade, is well prepared for the range.





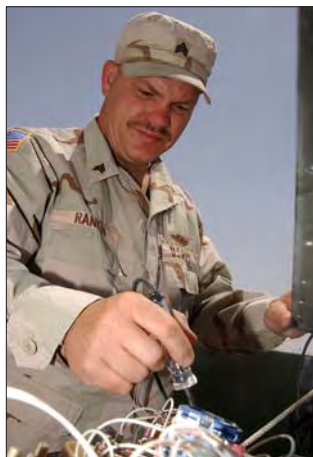
(From left): Sgt. Craig Leger, Staff Sgt. Gordon Turner and Pfc. Gordan Boltz work together to move a trailer in the 72nd Signal Battalion motorpool. The Soldiers are part of the 301st Signal Company.



Sgt. 1st Class Roxanne Lee grills it up for the HHC BBQ.



Staff Sgt. Frederick Turner instructs on heat injuries.



Sgt. Alfred Rankin checks on a generator during motor maintenance.



In his shelter, Pvt 2 Ryan Barraclough works on electronics issues for the 72nd Signal Battalion.



Sgt. 1st Class Daniel Cornell and Capt. Tracy Williams on the firing line.

## ***Reagan remembered***



Photo by Staff Sgt. Peter Fitzgerald

The flag is lowered to half-staff at Camp Doha in tribute to Ronald Reagan, the nation's 40th president, who died June 5. President George W. Bush ordered flags to be displayed at half-staff for a period of 30 days, and declared June 11 to be a National Day of Mourning.